

## INTRODUCTION: SCAFFOLDING

**I**N THE FOURTH–SIXTH CENTURIES, THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF THE Roman empire, with its vaunted architectural achievements, underwent profound transformation. North African city centers at the intersection of their main arteries shifted, old buildings were refurbished for new purposes, new buildings rose from grounds once considered unsuitable, and walls were built that redefined the city limits. Once seen by modern scholars as an abrupt change, a direct consequence of the collapse and Christianization of the Roman empire, this transformation has more recently been understood as a far more gradual process prompted by economic and demographic changes. Yet early Christian historiographers construed the customary mechanisms of spatial transformation – imperial largess, disuse, reuse, use of spolia, changes in ownership, architectural alterations, to name just a few – in religious terms. Why did they characterize these nonviolent spatial activities as hostile takeovers and intentional destructions? Christian literary sources from this period construe spatial transformation as the defeat of Judaism and what they refer to as “paganism.” Christian leaders seized the opportunity afforded by temple abandonment and synagogue decline to promote their imagined interpretation of the shifting landscape, the victory of Christianity. This imaginal map was useful for securing imperial support, asserting authority, as well as negotiating and patrolling group boundaries.

To explore these issues, this book examines ancient notions of place and explores the spatial relations between religious competitors in the late Roman provinces of North Africa. The examples of Christians, practitioners of traditional Roman rites, and Jews suggest that not only did places of communal religious assembly serve as focal points for religious competition, but Christian writers claimed that the changing landscape of Late Antiquity augured their triumph. I argue that the rhetoric of spatial contestation was a key component in negotiating religious identifications that

underwent seismic shifts over the course of the third through fifth centuries. I contend that what made this possible was a particular conception of religious place that anthropologists have termed “place identity.” Place identity is the constellation of ideas, behaviors, emotions, and values that people associate with a particular location in their physical environment. Those associations are called “place meanings.” By exploring what certain places meant, what they symbolized to their audiences, we are better able to determine why these sites were targeted for negotiating group boundaries and identification. With church buildings increasingly portrayed and perceived by late antique North Africans as loci of authority and divine forces, their symbolic power grew. The acts of seizing, damaging, or destroying them thereby acquired their own symbolic power from these buildings’ place meanings and from the place identities related to them.

By focusing on one particular part of the Roman empire, this study aims to take seriously regional variation while also attempting to redress its omission from previous treatments of spatial conflict. The recent study of Antioch by Christine Shepardson is a superb example of this kind of regional work. My choice of North Africa rests on two foundations: First, it is understudied.<sup>1</sup> Second, and more importantly, spatial contestation plays out somewhat differently in this region than in the eastern part of the empire, where religious motivations more directly “altered the cityscape,” as Shepardson has demonstrated.<sup>2</sup>

Christian writers described architectural transformations using terms related to violence and power because spatial control correlated to dominance, and spatial boundaries could be associated with boundaries of group identification. In North Africa, these narratives took their cues initially from intra-Christian struggles for spatial control and subsequently applied the paradigm to relations with non-Christians. The idea of triumph was concretized by capturing or destroying the symbol of an adversary’s power, or that which was regarded as most “sacred” or “holy.”

The terms “sacred (*sacrum*)” and “holy (*sanctus*)” reproduce ancient modifiers used to describe material objects that were differentiated from other objects by their use for religious ritual and their association with divine power. “Sacra” appears in inscriptions describing rituals, while “sanctus” appears in inscriptions describing objects dedicated by devoted donors.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is undergoing reversal in the past decade (see the recent works of Stern, Shaw, Rebillard, Dessey, Leone, and Burns and Jensen).

<sup>2</sup> Christine Shepardson, *Controlling Contested Places: Late Antique Antioch and the Spatial Politics of Religious Controversy* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), p. 241.

<sup>3</sup> ILaI 1 506 = CIL 8.20903, a mosaic pavement from the late fourth-century chapel built by the bishop Alexander in Tipasa: *Omnis sacra canens, sacramento manus porrigere gaudens*

Literature goes beyond these attributions, assigning the adjectives to ritual sites themselves.<sup>4</sup> Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, refers to churches as “consecrated places” (*locis ei sacratīs*).<sup>5</sup> The functions and associated meanings of these edifices enabled both users and observers to distinguish them from their surroundings and to recognize their ascribed value.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to conveying dominance, spatial boundaries were useful tools for creating and reinforcing social boundaries. As Maijastina Kahlos has demonstrated, Christian polemicists, apologists, and shapers of Christian culture used spatial separation – both rhetorically and physically – to identify particular types of difference and thereby define the boundaries between themselves and others. This strategy is challenged by Faustus of Milevus, a Manichean teacher, in his dispute over the genealogy of religious groups with Augustine, a former practitioner of Manichaeism himself:<sup>7</sup>

You are indeed a schism from your parent group, having nothing different except your place of assembly. ... Hence, it is clear that you and the Jews are schisms from the gentiles. Holding their faith and rites, though slightly changed, you think that you are sects [i.e. distinct groups] only because you meet separately.

Faustus claimed that Christians and Jews were “gentile” offshoots (i.e. non-Christian, non-Jewish) because the rites they practiced were similar to those of gentiles, despite their apparent claims to the contrary, claims

(Rejoicing in every sacred singing and extending the hands for the sacrament; see discussion in Paul Monceaux, “Enquête sur l’épigraphie Chrétienne d’Afrique,” *Revue Archéologique* 4.8 (July–December 1906): 297–310, 297–300), and also in epitaphs of consecrated virgins (CIL 8.27915 = ILaG 1 3430 = ILCV 1702); ILCV 1 1824 = CIL 8.20914, a mosaic pavement dedicating renovations of the St. Salsa cemetery basilica in Tipasa: *Munera quae cernis quo sancta altaria fulgent* (The benefactions that you see, by which the holy altars shine).

<sup>4</sup> *Reg. Eccl. Carthag. Excerpta* (401) c. 60 (CCSL 149: 196): ... *in natalibus beatissimorum martyrum per nonnullas civitates et in ipsis locis sacris* (in some cities on the birthdays of most blessed martyrs, and in the very sacred places themselves).

<sup>5</sup> *Aug. Civ. Dei* 1.3.41.

<sup>6</sup> This understanding of “sacred” space relies on Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 11–26.

<sup>7</sup> Faustus apud *Aug. c. Faust.* 20.4.1, tr. Roland Teske, slightly modified, *The Works of Saint Augustine* (4th Release). Electronic Edition. Answer to Faustus, a Manichean. Vol. 1/20 (Charlottesville, VA: InteLex Corporation, 2014) (CSEL 25.1): *estis sane schisma a matrice sua diversum nihil habens nisi conventum ... quare constat vos atque iudaeos schismata esse gentilitatis, cuius fidem tenentes et ritus modice quamvis immutatos de sola conventuum divisione putatis vos esse sectas*. For the most thorough examination of Augustine’s relationship to his Manichaean past, see Jason BeDuhn, *Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma*, 2/3 vols. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009 and 2013).

substantiated by the fact that their assemblies met in separate locations.<sup>8</sup> This line of argument, even if it was not entirely convincing, illustrates that space was recognized in antiquity as a feature of group identification.

Ancient writers like Augustine used the paradigm of spatial conflict and conquest, which I term “spatial supersession,” to represent one Christian group’s dominance, or victory, over those portrayed as opponents, whether they be other Christians, practitioners of Roman traditional religion, or Jews. Their rhetorical inventions were so successful that they contributed to a widespread perception, repeated by scholars over the decades, that such “temple closures” and “synagogue destructions” accurately described the predominant relation between Christians and the sacred places of their neighbors, namely “pagans” and Jews.<sup>9</sup> Until recently, historians took at face value the discourse of ancient historiographers and polemicists. There are several problems with this historical pattern of reconstruction: first, such assessments do not distinguish between events and their interpretation or rhetoric; second, these evaluations rarely consider archaeological evidence, and when they do, they focus on inscriptions; and, finally, little attention has been paid to intra-Christian spatial conflicts. This study attempts to redress these omissions.

### Background

Of all the achievements for which Roman civilization is known, architecture – particularly city-building – is among the most significant. The history of Roman architecture is often included in architecture curricula because later western architecture builds on its foundations, both theoretically and literally. Despite historians’ embrace of the term “late antiquity” to refer to the period spanning the third–sixth centuries, archaeologists have been slow to adopt corresponding vocabulary. “Archaeologists,” as Luke Lavan points out, “have generally preferred to remain as Roman, Early Medieval, Byzantine or ‘Christian.’”<sup>10</sup> Yet these traditional labels fail to account for

<sup>8</sup> Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures c. 360–430* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), p. 59. Kahlos notes Augustine’s interesting use of Christian exceptionalism in his response to this claim.

<sup>9</sup> Marcel Simon, *Venus Israel: A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (AD 135–425)*, tr. H. McKeating (Valentine Mitchell & Co. Ltd.: 1948: 1996), pp. 224–233, 264–266; Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l’Empire romain. Leur condition juridique, économique et sociale*. 2 vols. (New York: Burt Franklin, 1914) I: 469–472; James Parkes, *The Conflict Between the Church and the Synagogue* (Jewish Publication Society: 1934: 1961), pp. 166–168, 187, 204–209, 235–236, 231, 244, 263; and Levine, *Ancient Synagogue*, pp. 68, 77, 115, 249, 258, 298, 308.

<sup>10</sup> Luke Lavan and William Bowden (ed.), *Theory and Practice in Late Antique Archaeology*. Late Antique Archaeology 1, (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), p. vii.

the discontinuities observed by archaeologists of the period during which Christianization occurred. In this post-Diocletian period, the archaeology of religious sites reflects “long-term changes within Roman society” and a “recognizably distinct late antique situation.”<sup>11</sup>

Not only does the archaeology of late antiquity reflect gradual social changes rather than abrupt decline, but, on a more microcosmic level, it reveals more incremental and subtle dynamics in the changing social fabric. These changes were not primarily motivated by religious impulses, as Anna Leone has demonstrated in her masterful analysis of the transformation of the religious landscape of late antique North Africa. Leone observes that “religion was not (apart from specific cases or events) a source of friction in Late Antique North Africa” whose results can be observed in the transformation of cityscapes.<sup>12</sup>

Among the processes of accommodation, deliberate destruction occurred relatively infrequently, despite numerous accounts of such violence left by ancient Christian historians.<sup>13</sup> Destruction that reconfigured the physical landscape itself was more often the result of natural disasters such as earthquakes and lightning fires or less spectacular human causes like neglect. Occasionally, property was forcibly seized and reappropriated, or even demolished, but these incidents are the exception rather than the norm. Sometimes these dispossessions occurred under legal auspices; more often, perpetrators were deemed to be in violation of Roman law and were duly punished.<sup>14</sup> Rather than perceiving the urban landscape as primarily

<sup>11</sup> Lavan and Bowden, *Late Antique Archaeology*, p. viii.

<sup>12</sup> Anna Leone, *The End of the Pagan City. Religion, Economy, and Urbanism in Late Antique North Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 235.

<sup>13</sup> Leone, *Pagan City*, pp. 237, 243; Stephen Emmel, Ulrich Gotter, and Johannes Hahn, “‘From Temple to Church’: Analysing a Late Antique Phenomenon of Transformation,” *From Temple to Church. Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, and Ulrich Gotter (Boston, MA: Brill, 2008), pp. 1–21. See also Aude Busine, “From Stones to Myth: Temple Destruction and Civic Identity in the Late Antique Roman East,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 6.2 (2013): 325–346; Troels Myrup Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods: Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Late Antiquity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013); Jitse Dijkstra, “The Fate of the Temples in Late Antique Egypt,” in *The Archaeology of Late Antique “Paganism,”* ed. Luke Lavan and Michael Mulryan, pp. 389–436 (Leiden: Brill, 2011); and Richard Bayliss, *Provincial Cilicia and the Archaeology of Temple Conversion*, BAR International Series 1281 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>14</sup> David Riggs has noted: “When one sets aside empire-wide generalizations about the conversion of the Roman world and allows the African narrative of rural Christianization to unfold according to the dictates of local evidence alone, a picture emerges in which the vitality of traditional worship and the tolerance of religious pluralism are much more conspicuous than sectarian violence and coercion and in which methods of persuasion, such as the propagation of Christian apologetic, appear to have played a more critical role in the

religious, city centers were conceptualized as predominantly “secular,” that is, the province of a general public, where civic buildings reflected the collective memory of ruling elites.<sup>15</sup> To wit, Leone observes a fourth-century shift from the locus of temples to bath complexes as sites for producing elite memory.<sup>16</sup> She concludes that North African towns and cities were architecturally reconfigured and behaviors were adapted in order to accommodate new social and economic patterns of daily life.

These spatial changes occurred incrementally, in stages. In the pre-Vandal period, for example, marble statues and architectural features “were initially dismantled and stored or reused because they retained symbolic ... as well as artistic value.”<sup>17</sup> Statues, as Laura Nasrallah has shown, symbolized Roman values from idealized human traits to divine attributes, from individual triumphs to collective memories, from marital accord to public concord, and from personal attachments to a person’s civic duty, status, and power.<sup>18</sup> Although Nasrallah is quick to point out that these meanings were certainly not stable, the sheer plethora of meanings attunes the modern observer to their social significance.<sup>19</sup> Not only were statues stored and reused for their symbolic value, they were also reused for their aesthetic and pragmatic worth. The reuse of marble coincides with the decline of the marble trade in North Africa.<sup>20</sup> Such social and economic exigencies influenced building practices, which reflected a desire “to maintain the monumentality of their cities and the intention to carry on this [ancient Roman] tradition.”<sup>21</sup> As new places served as productive loci for displaying narratives of a past shared by their patrons, the geometry of the ancient city was transformed.

eventual ‘triumph of Christianity’ than is usually assumed” (David Riggs, “Christianizing the Rural Communities of Roman North Africa: A Process of Coercion or Persuasion?,” *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices*, ed. H. A. Drake, with Emily Albu, Susanna Elm, Michael Maas, Claudia Rapp, and Michele Salzman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2006): 297–308, p. 297).

<sup>15</sup> Leone, *Pagan City*, p. 236. Note Leone’s use of the term secular in scare quotes, “intended as indicating all the aspects of the municipal life in North African communities, encompassing issues such as legislation, economy, and religious power. The ‘secular city’, as Markus proposes, progressively from the 4th to the 6th century saw the reduction of the neutral space, gradually taken over by the Christian presence” (p. 14, citing Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Leone, *Pagan City*, p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> Leone, *Pagan City*, pp. 230–231.

<sup>18</sup> Laura Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church Amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Leone, *Pagan City*, p. 239.

<sup>21</sup> Leone, *Pagan City*, p. 242.

The theoretical assumptions about space, place, and identification that underlie my investigation are the subject of Chapter 1. Chapter 2 demonstrates that a particular conception of space made spatial contestation possible. I show that this conception emerged gradually, beginning in the second century, and was not a Constantinian innovation as some scholars have claimed. In Chapters 3, 4, and 5 I use archaeological evidence to help understand how Christian writers in late Roman North Africa deployed a discursive strategy of spatial supersession to convey a triumphalist understanding of the material world that they inhabited. The order of these chapters reflects my chronological argument that this spatial rhetoric was first developed within the context of intra-Christian disputes, then was subsequently deployed against traditional Roman sites and finally against Jewish synagogues.<sup>22</sup> In this manner, religious places were useful for concretely representing the abstract contestation over power and group identifications. Imperial reactions to the litany of petitions and legislation employing this discourse demonstrate that this strategy met with varying degrees of success.

My approach is grounded in the dismantling of certain assumptions that undergird certain scholars' treatment of the topic. I do not assume that Christianity was "inculcated" in late Roman society, because such approaches assume that "Christianity" was a static "entity" comprised of a certain set of beliefs and practices, and that late Roman society can be somehow identified apart from those beliefs and practices.<sup>23</sup> I show that although such a perception is promoted in the ancient sources, it is not useful for modern analyses of late antique social changes. I also reject the notion that the views presented by ancient Christian polemicists and apologists represent the views of all Christians of the time. Although writing is a vehicle for acquiring and exerting cultural power, preservation distorts the historical record by allowing later power realities to constrain the literary production of previous periods.

### Method

Written and material remains are the extant witnesses to ancient spatial relations. Historians have generally relied on written accounts for

<sup>22</sup> The sequence of this dynamic in legal codes has been noted by Paula Fredriksen, "Roman Christianity and the Post-Roman West: The Social Correlates of the *Contra Iudaeos* Tradition," in *Jews, Christians, and the Roman Empire. The Poetics of Power in Late Antiquity*, ed. Natalie B. Dohrmann and Annette Yoshiko Reed, pp. 249–265 (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), pp. 260–263.

<sup>23</sup> For a recent example, see Paul Veyne, *Quand notre monde est devenu chrétien* (Paris: Editions Albin Michel D.A., 2007).

reconstructing the Roman past, while material evidence remained the provenance of archaeologists. Elena Isayev has documented the more recent shift toward interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary projects that attempt to bring together these bodies of evidence and their specialists.<sup>24</sup> Awareness of how scholars produce knowledge about antiquity is fundamental for understanding how we gather and interpret evidence, and why reconsideration of earlier findings has recently emerged. In their book *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies*, Michael Gibbons and his colleagues distinguish earlier types of discipline- and evidence-segregated research (“Mode One”) from research that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century, which is question-based, contextual, and collaborative (“Mode Two”).<sup>25</sup> Isayev applies this distinction to research about antiquity. She notes that historians are still largely shaped by the literary turn of the 1970s, while archaeologists have moved beyond the new or processual archaeology of the 1970s to embrace “questions of *why* and *how*.”<sup>26</sup>

Some years ago, Garth Fowden encouraged historians to take all archaeological evidence into account, not merely inscriptions.<sup>27</sup> The field has responded to Fowden’s exhortation to a limited extent; many historians still rely primarily on linguistic material evidence. In the past decade, histories of the ancient world have been written by scholars trained not only in History, but also in Art History, Archaeology, Classics, and Religious Studies; some of these scholars have been trained in multiple disciplines.<sup>28</sup> Religious Studies, my own discipline, is itself an interdisciplinary field, drawing on all of the humanities and social sciences for its methods and scope of evidence. As humanities departments are eliminated in the current cultural and economic climate, specialists are finding themselves reassigned

<sup>24</sup> Elena Isayev, “Archaeology ≠ Object as History ≠ Text: Nudging the Special Relationship into the Post-Ironic,” *World Archaeology* 38.4, Debates in “World Archaeology” (December 2006): 599–610.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Gibbons, Camille Limoges, Helga Nowotny, Simon Schwartzman, Peter Scott, and Martin Trow, *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 1994), p. vii.

<sup>26</sup> Isayev, “Archaeology ≠ Object as History ≠ Text,” p. 603. For one example of an archaeologist’s historical analysis, see Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Spaces in the Late Antique Mediterranean: Architecture, Cult and Community* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> Garth Fowden, “Review: Between Pagans and Christians,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 78 (1988): 173–182, p. 180.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Karen B. Stern, *Inscribing Devotion and Death: Archaeological Evidence for Jewish Populations of North Africa* (Boston, MA: E. J. Brill, 2008).

to other departments: art historians to classics departments, archaeologists to anthropology departments, classicists to history departments. While this may seem like disciplinary chaos to those traditionally trained in singular fields, this “fuzziness of disciplinary boundaries” has forced these specialists to converge and collaborate around their subject areas, whether in departments, area studies, research projects, or conferences.<sup>29</sup> Gibbons et al. point out that earlier scholarship (“Mode One”) put scholars at the center of the inquiry: a scholar formulated the research question within the constraints of her own disciplinary knowledge, as determined by her academic training, in search of the definitive meta-narrative.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, “Mode Two” research is collaborative, transdisciplinary, and often motivated by current cultural concerns.<sup>31</sup> Isayev reminds us that the last of these, termed by its detractors as “fads,” is perfectly appropriate to the study of the past, because we can never “escape” our “presentist perspective.”<sup>32</sup>

Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, archaeologists of North Africa have been addressing interpretive issues that question the validity of earlier excavation reports and the conclusions historians drew from them.<sup>33</sup> Newly and re-excavated sites have been able to answer questions about usage and function that eluded previous historians.<sup>34</sup> Although there is considerable material evidence for North African churches, the current state of archaeological excavation does not permit more than a few identifications of dissident churches, contrary to the claims of earlier historians.<sup>35</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, the identification of a church with an inscription as “Catholic” is likely to indicate spatial contestation. While most of the evidence for intra-Christian spatial contestation is literary, the archaeological record does permit some general observations about sites that reflect spatial contestation.

<sup>29</sup> Gibbons et al., *The New Production of Knowledge*, p. 93.

<sup>30</sup> Gibbons et al., *The New Production of Knowledge*, pp. 90–110.

<sup>31</sup> Gibbons et al., *The New Production of Knowledge*, pp. 90–110.

<sup>32</sup> Isayev, “Archaeology ≠ Object as History ≠ Text,” p. 605.

<sup>33</sup> See Gareth Sears, *Late Roman African Urbanism. Continuity and Transformation in the City*, BAR International Series 1693 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007); and Anna Leone, *Changing Townscapes in North Africa From Late Antiquity to the Arab Conquest*, Studi storici sulla Tarda Antichità 28 (Bari, Italy: Edipuglia, 2007).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Susan Stevens, Angela V. Kalinowski, and Hans VanderLeest, *Bir Ftouha: A Pilgrimage Church Complex at Carthage*, Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series no. 59 (Portsmouth, RI: JRA, 2005).

<sup>35</sup> See Sears, *Late Roman African Urbanism*, p. 36, overturning claims made by W. H. C. Frend. Sears’ criteria of “the positioning of the churches on the site plans of a city” leads to a “Donatist” identification at Thamugadi, while inscriptions permit identification of an Alamiliaria martyr church (discussed in Chapter 3).

A similar predicament arises for synagogue conflicts. Apart from cemeteries and isolated synagogue remains, very little archaeological evidence exists for Jewish presence in late antique North Africa.<sup>36</sup> As Karen Stern, author of the most thorough treatment of Roman North African Jews to date, has pointed out, “the archaeological record is messy and unruly.”<sup>37</sup> Stern’s reconsideration of the archaeological evidence gives a remarkably rich and varied picture of Jewish life and identification in Roman North Africa, “clearing the brush” for explorations of other facets of North African Jewish experience, such as religious conflict.<sup>38</sup> How Jews figured into Christian discourse about spatial conflict, and to what extent the archaeological record can enhance our understanding of such portrayals is addressed in Chapter 5.

Archaeological evidence for temples is more extensive than for synagogues, yet the evaluation of such finds is fraught with challenges of dating, identification, and interpretation. Most excavations were carried out by French and Italian scholars, clergy, and soldiers in the late 1800s and early 1900s.<sup>39</sup> Their interest in North African archaeology grew out of their own colonial agendas and religious biases. Excavators sought to connect early Roman and Christian presence in North Africa to their own colonialist claims – as the heirs to Western civilization – to the ancient land. As a result, their stratigraphy reflects careless excavation of Islamic and late antique layers. Preservation and reconstruction, based on aesthetic principles, tended to focus on imperial and Byzantine periods.<sup>40</sup> Finds were often erroneously dated to the imperial period.<sup>41</sup> The postcolonial backlash produced equally problematic results, as archaeologists ignored forts, museums curated and stored artifacts poorly, and government officials did not protect excavated sites from despoliation and destruction. As the archaeological record has begun to be corrected, challenges remain that inhibit exploration of towns and cities located in or around currently expanding occupation, with the exception of the rescue excavations, rural settlements, and more remote towns.

This study brings together archaeological and historical research and employs spatial and identity theory to understand how one body of evidence

<sup>36</sup> See Stern, *Inscribing Devotion*, pp. 1–31, for the problems of Jewish archaeological evidence in North Africa.

<sup>37</sup> Stern, *Inscribing Devotion*, p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Stern, *Inscribing Devotion*, p. 32.

<sup>39</sup> Stern, *Inscribing Devotion*, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew H. Merrills, “Introduction,” *Vandals, Romans and Berbers: New Perspectives on Late Antique North Africa* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 8.

<sup>41</sup> David J. Mattingly and R. Bruce Hitchner, “Roman Africa: An Archaeological Review,” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 85(1995): 165–213, pp. 191, 201.